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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KISL](#) [KDEM](#) [JO](#)
SUBJECT: JORDAN ELECTIONS: THE BIG PICTURE - A STEP FORWARD
FOR DEMOCRACY AND CIVIL SOCIETY

REF: A. AMMAN 4612
[1](#)B. AMMAN 4561
[1](#)C. AMMAN 4559
[1](#)D. AMMAN 4547
[1](#)E. AMMAN 4294
[1](#)F. AMMAN 4277
[1](#)G. OSC JORDAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS GUIDE

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) More than two million Jordanians have the chance to vote in the election for Jordan's next parliament on November 20 (refs F and G). As the campaign season ends and voting begins, Jordanian democracy has taken significant steps forward in terms of the role of women candidates and civil society in Jordanian elections. The campaign season has also brought issues such as poverty and unemployment to the forefront, while building momentum among voters and civil society to hold the new parliament accountable to voters (refs A and C). While the success of government and NGO efforts to ensure free, fair and transparent elections will become evident on election day and the days immediately thereafter, strides taken in recent weeks to empower civil society are sure to pay off in future elections as well as the current election. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) COMMENT: While most candidates and voters that polofffs have spoken to complain about some campaign tactics, most accept these tactics as part of the political process, and note that these tactics sometimes differ little from campaigning in Western countries (which is not to pretend Jordanian political development has reached those heights). Campaign rhetoric has focused on issues such as they are - though detailed policy debates are rare. Candidates have raised the big issues of unemployment, poverty, services, corruption, and the economy openly and without government interference in campaign literature, on campaign posters and while meeting with potential voters. The robust campaign season has taken Jordan a step forward in democratic reform. The campaign has created momentum for civil society organizations and voters to hold the next parliament accountable. END COMMENT AND SUMMARY.

The Facts

[1](#)3. (SBU) 2,454,686 registered voters in Jordan will have the chance to head to the polls to elect 110 members to the 15th lower house of Parliament on November 20. Almost 50 per cent of those registered voters are women. On the day before the election, 885 candidates, including 199 women, remain in the running for the 110 available seats. The number of candidates has reached as high as 1005, including 203 women.

Note: The drop in candidate numbers as election day approached reflected a handful of invalid registrations, and many more cases of candidate realization of impending defeat, as well as tribal political deals that coalesced support to one candidate or another. The candidates who pulled out in the week before the election are not pulling out as political protests. End note.

Huge Advance for Women, but Can They Win?

14. (C) The 199 women running for office represent a huge increase from the last parliamentary election - an almost 370 per cent increase over the 42 who ran in 2003 - and a significant step forward, reflecting the belief of many women that their place is in the political system because they can influence the outcome and raise their issues. Many of the women are tribally-affiliated candidates, demonstrated that the tribes are sensing that electoral gain can be realized by supporting women candidates. Unfortunately, winning seats outright will be difficult for the women candidates and only three women are considered to have a shot, albeit a difficult one, of winning outside of the six quota seats: IAF Zarga incumbent Hayat Massimi, Madaba incumbent Falak Jamaani and Karak lawyer Sabah Al-Majali (ref D).

GOJ Grants Unprecedented Role to Civil Society

15. (C) As Jordan votes on November 20, civil society organizations in Jordan and the GOJ will take a huge step forward by setting the precedent that civil society has a role to play in the Jordanian democratic process. While the GOJ has clumsily handled the issue of Jordanian NGO's

AMMAN 00004625 002 OF 003

"monitoring," "observing" or "following up" on the elections - as the semantic wrestling has played out in Jordan - the GoJ has taken the step of allowing civil society organization to, in effect, monitor the elections at least to some level, regardless of the final terminology and details (ref E). Though the government made some missteps on the issue of monitoring by issuing multiple contradictory statements from various ministries and spokespersons - even on the day before the election the details of that monitoring remain to be definitively pinned down - civil society has prepared in an unprecedented way for the responsibility of ensuring, together with the government, free, fair and transparent elections. For the first time in Jordanian electoral history, civil society organizations will play a role in elections supervision, joining the constitutionally mandated candidate representatives in ensuring the integrity of the poll.

16. (C) The National Center for Human Rights (NCHR) will have 150 volunteers monitoring the election process, reportedly from within polling stations - to be verified on election day. The Al-Hayat Center will have 1500 monitors scattered throughout the country on election day for observing the process from outside of polling centers, and the Jordanian Civil Alliance for Democratic Elections (JOCAD) will have 500 volunteers with the same mission of "following up" on the elections from outside of voting centers. The NCHR, Al-Hayat and JOCAD efforts are all supported by NDI training through USAID funding.

Government Aims for Transparency

17. (C) Per the relevant election laws and regulations, the Ministry of Interior is charged with implementing the election that will see 3997 ballot boxes spread among 1428 voting stations throughout the country. As part of its strategy to instill confidence in the process, the MOI, with IFES and USAID support, has produced a five minute documentary video, aired multiple times on national

television that describes the voting process in detail for voters, candidates and election officials alike. The MOI also published a handbook for election officials, paving the way for consistent procedures throughout the country.

A Road Paved with Good Intentions

¶18. (C) In terms of the voting process itself, the MOI has taken measures to try to ensure the integrity of the vote. To try to prevent multiple voting, the MOI has instituted a country-wide computer data base in which registered voters will be listed in a central data base. The MOI believes that this system will prevent multiple voting. While IFES and other observers believe the MOI is taking a risk with such a system that could cause delays in voting or that could fail through computer crashes, glitches, electricity outages or sabotage, the MOI is prepared to back up its system through paper voter rolls and voter registration rolls on cell phones in the voting stations. Note: IFES' representative working with the MOI recommended to MOI that it not use the computer system because of fears that the system could easily fail. MOI overruled IFES's concerns. End note.

¶19. (C) To discourage vote buying and selling, the MOI has banned cell phones from voting stations, and has instituted short screens around voting stations so that voters cannot hide behind screens to photograph their votes, or switch blank ballots with pre-marked ballots from outside, while voting (ref B). The MOI has also standardized voting for illiterates, opting for whispered verbal votes. The Ministry has threatened harsh and swift legal action against "fake" illiterate voters, although it remains uncertain how this will all work out in practice.

¶10. (C) The government has similarly threatened harsh legal action and penalties against other types of voting fraud including vote buying (ref B) and illegal voting district transfers (septel). Though little public information on the enforcement of infractions has surfaced, the MOI announced that 86,000 illegal voting district transfers were annulled (septel).

Comment

¶11. (C) While most candidates and voters that poloffs have spoken to complain about some campaign tactics mentioned above and in other reporting, most accept these tactics as part of the political process, and note that these tactics

AMMAN 00004625 003 OF 003

sometimes differ little from campaigning in Western countries. Campaign rhetoric has focused on issues such as they are - though detailed policy debates are rare. Candidates have raised the big issues of unemployment, poverty, services, corruption, and the economy openly and without government interference in campaign literature, on campaign posters and while meeting with potential voters. The robust campaign season has taken Jordan a step forward in democratic reform. Issues voters care about have been brought forward, and the campaign has created momentum for civil society organizations and voters to hold the next parliament accountable.

¶12. (C) At the very least, the gains by civil society in having a role in the current electoral process likely guarantee an even greater role for civil society in ensuring free, fair and transparent elections in the future. The monitoring genie is out of the bottle.

¶13. (SBU) Almost universally, candidates and voters have expressed confidence in the integrity of the process, citing statements made by King Abdullah that the government must ensure free and fair elections. King Abdullah was quoted in a Petra News Agency interview on November 6 saying, "I have

emphasized on more than one occasion that the government is required to conduct free, fair and transparent elections that guarantee wide voter participation and I hope that citizens will participate" and choose the candidate that will place "the national interest ahead of all other considerations." On the eve of the election, the King's messages seem to have taken hold.

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